



by Marisa Hirsch

When *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* "went steel," Southern Components, Inc. delivered.

The premise of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (EMHE) is now one that most people, including those in the structural building components industry, are quite familiar with. Now in its fourth season, the show revolving around the ultra-rapid construction of a home for a family in need has been a big hit for ABC. Over the show's course, several WTCA member companies have participated in the show and been featured in **SBC**. However, the episode featuring the Collins family build, which aired on April 29, 2007, was different. The Collins home was built out of cold-formed steel components.

While this was not the first time a steel structure appeared on EMHE, it was the first known occurrence of a WTCA member company donating steel components. Southern Components, Inc. (SCI) in Shreveport, LA, donated approximately \$30,000 worth of cold-formed steel roof trusses to the Collins build in Murfreesboro, AR. SCI, which has both wood and steel divisions, was approached about participating in the show by RealSteel Homes in Rogers, AR—one of their steel customers.

#### Good Sense, Good Cause

RealSteel Homes is a company that, according to its website ([www.realsteelhomes.net](http://www.realsteelhomes.net)), is dedicated to helping rebuild the residential community of the Gulf Coast Region. After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the company purchased tracts of land in Ocean Springs, MS, and began building steel duplex homes and steel single-family homes. SCI started working with RealSteel Homes after being asked to bid a project and coming in with the best price, plus being in a convenient location—close to the coast of Mississippi where RealSteel had purchased land.

Jason Windham, SCI's steel truss division manager, said that RealSteel contacted SCI to bid on some of their projects in 2005. Their business relationship grew posi-



tively from there, which led to SCI's agreeing to participate in EMHE when RealSteel approached them in December 2006. After having built a healthy business relationship with the company, SCI was willing to donate at their customer's request. Plus, of course, it was a good cause. But, one thing that did not contribute to SCI's decision to participate was a hope for publicity.

"We did not do it for the publicity, because the truss suppliers get very little recognition," said Windham. "Most suppliers get very little. At the end of the show, they ran a credit.... It was really for our customer. They asked us to [participate] and we were happy to do it."

#### Metal Minded

RealSteel Homes was formed in 2005 after the president of PB2 Architecture and Engineering (Steve Butcher) and the president of Stoam (Russ Wright) met at an earlier EMHE build. PB2 is an architecture and engineering firm with offices

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"If you've got a good customer involved, somebody you're doing a lot of business with or that you're trying to do a lot of business with, then I would say it would be well worth it. The contractors really do appreciate all the suppliers. I think it goes a long way to building a business relationship with some customers to participate in something like this." —Jason Windham, Southern Components, Inc.

#### at a glance

- ❑ Southern Components, Inc. donated the first known set of cold-formed steel components for an *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* project.
- ❑ An insulated foam product was used in the home's steel wall panels.
- ❑ SCI worked with a new builder customer on this project, and hopes to do more business with them the future.

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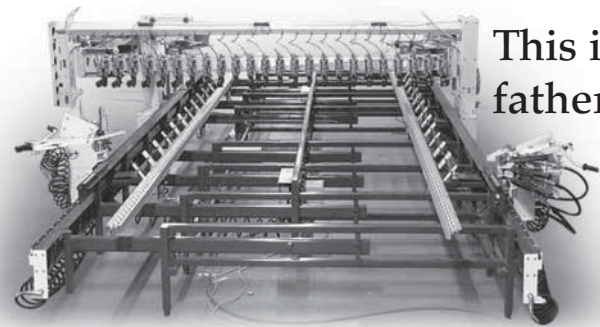
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## Steel Style

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in Dallas, Chicago, Kennedale, TX and Rogers, AR. Stoam, based in Springfield, MO, is the maker of a patented unified wall assembly that combines steel framing and foam insulation. After meeting at the previous build, Wright and Butcher decided to join together and form RealSteel Homes, which uses Stoam's product in every home it builds.

"They could see that there was a need in the construction industry, and in residential building, too, for a panelized sustainable building model," said Cindy Branscum, general manager at RealSteel. "Since the panels were built with steel, then the steel trusses just seemed logical."

Windham, who is knowledgeable about the Stoam product used in all RealSteel homes, is aware of the link between that product and the company's use of cold-formed steel trusses.



"The foam-insulated metal wall panel pushed [RealSteel] toward using metal trusses," Windham said. "They had access to that [product]. They thought a metal truss would complement that, and they could present it to homeowners as all-steel construction."

While Murfreesboro (where the Collins family home was built) is not in a coastal area, most of RealSteel's projects are. Branscum explained that in Mississippi and other coastal states, some homeowners need wind insurance, which can be very expensive. However, the cost may be less if a home has a semi-wind resistive rating—which means it meets the requirement of being able to withstand 30 psf of pressure. Branscum said that owning a home with this semi-wind resistive rating means a possible wind insurance rate reduction of up to 60 percent.

"Our homes meet that [requirement]," Branscum said.



**"I would say that we probably had about one week to do the design work and about ten days to actually fabricate the trusses (after the designs were approved). So it was on a very short fuse."**

—Jason Windham

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## Speedy Success

After RealSteel had formed and was working with SCI for their projects in Mississippi, Butcher was approached again by EMHE to see if he'd be interested in participating in another build. Branscum said that Butcher was interested, but this time he wanted to participate as RealSteel Homes instead of PB2. After this was agreed upon, RealSteel approached SCI to ask them to be part of the show.

Windham said it was December 2006 when RealSteel asked SCI to participate in EMHE, and SCI agreed. In mid-January 2007, the company received the house's preliminary floor plan to work with. Windham began the design work, which he did all of, at the end of January. The trusses were built over the course of about ten days.

"I would say that we probably had about one week to do the design work and about ten days to actually fabricate the trusses (after the designs were approved)," Windham said. "So it was on a very short fuse."

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Fortunately, the EMHE work came at what ended up being a good time for SCI. Things were a bit slower in their steel division than they had been, so the company wasn't forced to lose any business due to their willingness to donate. They were also able to use two crews, run two lines and get all the trusses fabricated within normal working hours.

"We were able to work it in without having to put other jobs

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off or turn down other work," said Windham. "Right now we're pretty busy, and this would not be a good time. So it happened to work out in our favor."

Windham said the hardest part of being involved was sticking to the required timeline. "You know the importance of the job and that you can't run behind," he said. "You can't have a delivery a day later than they expected...on something like this, where you've got so many volunteers and they're on such a strict schedule to get this job finished and furnished in a week."

SCI did succeed in keeping to the schedule, but when their

trusses arrived at the jobsite, there was a wait to get them unloaded. "That was a downside," said Windham. "It's kind of a 'Hurry up!' and then we had to get there and wait."

### Large Contribution, Valuable Customer

Overall, Windham said the process and experience of working on an EMHE project was interesting and positive. "It's really amazing—the whole production, what goes into it and how many people are involved," he said.

Watching the program and hearing the story of the family and the sacrifices they'd made felt rewarding, Windham said. "It makes you feel good that you were a part of it and able to contribute to that."

Windham also said the secrecy surrounding the program was an interesting aspect of the job. For example, a project number was assigned to the job, and that's what it was called in all the paperwork. Another secretive element was the location. SCI wasn't told exactly where the job was until about a week before delivery. Until then, they'd only known it was in southwest Arkansas. "It's really hush-hush," said Windham. "They don't want the word getting out of what the job is. They don't want the homeowner to find out about it."

While there were several things that made participating in the show a positive experience, there was one main thing that really made the project worthwhile for SCI. That was the fact that the company did it for a valued customer—a customer they had worked well with over a couple of years, and would like to continue working with. Windham said that if a component manufacturer is considering being a part of EMHE, it should be for a valued customer or for a company the CM

hopes to do business with in the future. Windham said SCI would not have done it for a general contractor they weren't familiar with or hadn't worked with in the past—and he said he doesn't think other CMs should either.

"It's a large contribution for a smaller company, but overall it was a good experience," he said. "If you've got a good customer involved, somebody you're doing a lot of business with or that you're trying to do a lot of business with, then I would say it would be well worth it. The contractors really do appreciate all the suppliers. I think it goes a long way to building a business relationship with some customers to participate in something like this." **SBC**

# "We lost [everything]."

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